

Heart of Gold by Yellow_LEAVES

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Genre: Anal Fingering, Anal Sex, Blow Jobs, Co-Parenting, Crying, Gay Sex, Good Sibling Billy Hargrove, Hurt/Comfort, Hurts So Good, I attempted to look like I knew stuff, Lonely Steve Harrington, M/M, Panic Attacks, Steve is a disaster, Sweet Steve, Tags to be added, but we love him, fear of the dark, no beta we die like men, pretty much the whole gang - Freeform, probably, that ass though, without meaning to

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Summary:

It turned out that Billy, unlike Steve, had managed to juggle it all: parties, popularity, keeping up his grades, and working his ass off at two part time jobs. So, while Steve was applying to summer positions at the mall and wondering what the hell he was going to do with his life, Billy was capitalizing on his new status as a legal adult and fighting not only for his future but for Max's.

1. Into Summer

Author's Note:

Credit for canon info goes to the creators of Stranger Things.

Steve had been watching Billy a lot recently. It built up slowly over time. Somehow rolling his eyes at Billy's over the top peacocking at school turned into watching him trade insults with Max outside of the arcade, which turned into sneaking covert glances during classes and the discovery that Billy actually took notes. As time passed, and he accidentally learned more and more about the new 'king' of Hawkins high, a longing began to manifest in the back of his mind. He wanted to know more.

So, he watched. He showed up to school early and waited for the familiar roar of Billy's ostentatious blue Camaro, waited to see Billy rise from the car, run his fingers through his curls, and direct an undoubtedly snarky comment at Max before they went their separate ways. Basketball provided an easy cover for what Steve was starting to think of as 'Billy Watch' or, when he was being particularly honest with himself 'My Most Likely Unhealthy and Probably Creepy Mission to Spy on Billy Hargrove.' It didn't help that Billy loved to get all up in Steve's space during practice. He was so gross, sweating all over the place... all over Steve. It was gross. Really.

The worst though were the infrequent moments of calm in what was otherwise a whirlwind of assholery. The times when Steve would catch a glimpse of Billy and Max having lunch together at the diner, both with content looks on their faces, as if everything were all right with the world because there were French fries and hamburgers. Or when he caught Billy tutoring a struggling classmate in the back of the library, as if he were on a top-secret mission that would inevitably fail if anyone found out about it.

It was so confusing, seeing all the ways that Billy seemed to be changing since the fight at the Byers. Like Steve had come back to school just to find that the world had turned upside down and people who used to want to beat the shit out of him were nice now. Though,

now he was wondering if he hadn't been seeing things as they really were before. If maybe his focus on popularity had blurred out important information. It's not that Billy was suddenly nice now. He was still a cocky son of a bitch who used curse words like adjectives and smoked like a fucking chimney. He still drove Steve crazy. But less. Practice was Steve's only lasting connection to normalcy, the only time that he could believe nothing had changed, that Billy was still the unbelievable ass who had smashed his face in mere months earlier, but practice couldn't last forever.

By the time graduation rolled around Steve had no idea what he was doing with his life. His closest friends were preteens, he had been rejected from every college he had applied to, and his favourite hobby was stalking local bad-boy-love-boat Billy Hargrove. The same Billy Hargrove who had applied to and gotten accepted by Harvard, Yale, MIT, and Brown for God's sake. The same Billy who had turned them all down opting instead to start a legal suite for custody of his stepsister.

It turned out that Billy, unlike Steve, had managed to juggle it all: parties, popularity, keeping up his grades, and working his ass off at two part time jobs. Now he had earned himself financial stability, a summer position at the pool lined up, prospects as an apprentice Mechanic for the fall, and support from Sheriff Jim Hopper, who happened to have gone to school with the judge in charge of Billy's case. So, while Steve was applying to summer positions at the mall and wondering what the hell he was going to do with his life, Billy was capitalizing on his new status as a legal adult and fighting not only for his future but for Max's.

Steve had never even thought about what Billy's home life might be like, but now he had no choice but to learn about the whole grizzly affair. As Max was part of the group Dustin hung around with, and Dustin was Steve's closest friend at the moment (read: only), Steve was getting all the details almost directly from the source. Turns out Billy's dad was a piece of shit who got off on beating up his wife, then his son, and now, since Billy was leaving, may very well focus his aggressive tendencies toward Max. Steve's first question had been, why the hell wouldn't Max's mum do something? According to Max, her mom loved Neil and didn't see a problem. Supposedly, all she

saw was a necessary discipline being administered to a son, who, allegedly, had queer tendencies. These were not confirmed, but the word 'queer' wriggled its way into Steve's mind and made itself very comfortable.

You couldn't be queer in this world. Not openly at least. You could go right ahead and be queer if you wanted, but God help you if you acted on it. Men were supposed to settle down with quiet women, produce lots of babies, work a boring day job, and not challenge the status quo. The only problem was that, in Steve's experience, people weren't made that way. Women weren't quiet and unassuming, in fact most of the women he knew were loud and opinionated and a hell of a lot smarter than he was. Men, for some reason, were harder for Steve to get a read on. Billy, for example, had always seemed to fit into the cookie cutter mold that the world had created; he was strong, and arrogant, someone who would put you in your place, take what he wanted and never apologize. Someone, in short, who could complete a full day of supporting the nation's economy and then come home to corral his wife into submission, make a valiant attempt at adding to the population, and be asleep early enough to rise refreshed and begin the cycle all over again. But things are never as they seem.

Billy wasn't self-centered and self-assured at all. He was coping and hiding and fighting for a future that was so important to him it had dictated every move he made for years. He was a fighter, with a heart of gold, and he was fighting the system. Telling the world to screw itself because there was a kid in danger and Billy wasn't going to rest until he knew she was safe, even though that meant challenging his father's rights.

Max had come over one night to stay with Steve, because she wasn't allowed to stay with Billy during the suit, and she didn't want to be at her house. She had been very calm when Mrs. Wheeler dropped her off. They didn't speak for a long time, just ate their pizza. By the time Max broke the silence, Steve felt like he was drowning in his own thoughts.

"Billy could have just left, you know. Neil had been beating him up his whole effin' life, I bet he'd been counting down the days until his eighteenth birthday for years," she was chewing around her thumb

nail rather aggressively. There was a brief pause before she admitted, in a choked voice, "I don't think I would have stayed. You know. If I were him."

Steve wanted to say something like, "of course you would have! You're a great kid!" but in the end he just squeezed her shoulder and stayed quiet. What did being good have to do with it anyway?

"We aren't even close you know," tears began to trickle down Max's cheeks and she gave a particularly harsh chomp to her finger, "like, I've always been a little shit to him, ratting him out when I know it'll get him in trouble. I mean I didn't know, okay. I had no idea how fucked up it was until a year or so ago. But it was still shitty. Why would he fight for me like this?" Her voice was broken and choppy by the time she stumbled to halt.

Steve cursed himself for being so crap at keeping house when he cast his eyes around in search of tissues and came up empty.

"All siblings are kind of shit," she gave him a look, as if to say, 'how the hell would you know?' Steve decided to ignore that and soldiered on, "all siblings are shit, but that doesn't mean they don't care about each other. Who else in Billy's life knows all of the little details about him like you do? You are there literally all the time, right? I bet you know his favourite band, and what deodorant he uses, and what music he listens to early in the morning, and what chores he hates, and how long it takes him to do his hair. Come on, who else knows these things? Seriously?" Max fought a smile.

"If he didn't fight to keep you, there would be no guarantee that all of his secrets would be safe. Honestly, I think it's all a ploy to keep you quiet. It won't work of course, I'm sure I could wheedle the information out of you."

Steve's imagined reasons grew more and more ludicrous as the night progressed until Max couldn't help but laugh at some of his more outlandish ideas, like when he suggested that Billy was really an alien who was studying the brain functions of red headed teenage girls with bad attitudes and an affinity for nerdy boys, and without Max it would be really hard for him to find another test subject.

Despite how much Steve heard about Billy and how central to life he seemed, Steve didn't actually interact with him until nearly the end of the summer. The conversation did not go how he may have imagined. For one, it wasn't Billy who spoke to him, it was Hopper. They both showed up at Steve's house, Billy hovering slightly behind Hopper, looking more nervous than Steve had ever seen him. He let them in, tried to offer them drinks- he only had water and juice boxes- and food- peanut butter and the butt ends of a loaf of bread- before they all took seats in the living room empty handed.

Hopper tackled the problem head on, "listen kid, we came to ask for your help. I know that Max and her friends hang around with you a lot, and we thought you'd be the best option. We want you to support Billy during the case, you've seen them together, you've probably heard stuff from Max about what her life is like at home and how their Dad acts. I want you to know that you don't have to, but if you could stand up for Max it could really help nudge the case in our favour."

Steve didn't even think about it before answering. In fact, he barely let Hopper finish speaking before he agreed and asked what they needed him to do.

The rest of the summer passed in a blur of lawyers and questions and on one very memorable occasion, Neil losing his shit and cursing out the judge. In the end, Billy's struggle was successful, and they moved Max's stuff out of her old house two days before school was due to begin. She was now the proud occupant of the largest bedroom in Billy's two-bedroom apartment which was not precisely in town, but not as far out as their previous house had been. She asked if she could paint her room black and Billy told her she could do whatever the fuck she wanted with the place, because it was all hers. So, she told Steve to take her shopping for painting stuff, because "Billy's busy, and you have no life," and they painted her room midnight black. She hated it.

It took four coats of paint to cover the black, and the end result was a vaguely patchy blush colour that Max insisted was actually off white. Billy and Steve exchanged meaningful glances above her head, but decided it was safer to keep their thoughts to themselves. There had been a lot of meaningful glances between them in the last months.

There had also been a lot of actual conversation, which was infinitely weirder. Billy may have been fighting to adopt Max, but he had accidentally adopted Steve somewhere along the way.

Steve felt more at home in that cramped little apartment than he ever had in his big empty house. Also, Billy was cleaner than Steve was, which was a surprise. Everything in the apartment was spotless, nothing lying around, no dust or dirt, or forgotten mugs. At least not until Steve showed up. He prided himself on making the place look significantly more lived in. Billy bitched about it constantly.

Out of necessity, the way that they interacted had changed significantly since this whole situation started. In order to convince everyone that Steve believed Billy to be trustworthy and responsible, he had to learn to have a civil conversation with the guy, and once he knew how, he couldn't seem to go back. That's not to say they didn't argue, because they did, all the time- "like an old married couple" as Max liked to say with an over enthusiastic roll of her eyes, Steve did his best to ignore her- but they always got over whatever it was. Things didn't stick between them anymore, maybe because there wasn't enough space between them for disagreements to nest in. They were being parents together, even if neither would admit to it, and Steve wasn't even aware of it, and that had brought them close in a way that nothing else could.

Max was old enough to stay home by herself when Billy had to work nights, but she didn't like to. Not after everything with the upside down. So, Billy would call Steve when the need arose, and he would show up with movies and an excessive amount of snacks and tell Billy not to worry, that they would definitely trash the place, and douse his bed with silly string, which only actually happened once, and it wasn't technically Steve's fault. All in all, he was becoming very mature and trustworthy. Three cheers for Steve.

2. A Birthday and the Weather

Steve was sleeping. He was huddled in the midst of a pile of pillows and blankets on his bedroom floor- the bed was occupied by a drooling Robin- when the phone started ringing downstairs. Robin threw a pillow at him and grumbled something that sounded vaguely like, "Get the bone."

The journey downstairs could not accurately be called a walk, more of a dazed stumble that involved a lot of leaning against walls. It was a shock, honestly, when he reached the kitchen and the phone was still ringing. Surely it had taken him so long that the person on the other end had given up? But they hadn't, which made Steve nervous, and set his hands to shaking, which prolonged the process of answering even more.

Finally, the phone was against his ear, "Hello?" his voice was rough with sleep and he cleared his throat.

"Hey Steve? It's Billy. Would you be able to come over?" His voice was carefully calm in a way that did not reassure Steve.

"Where are you? Are you alright? What happened?" his eyes swept the room in search of his keys, which he spotted in the fruit bowl. Then he tried to walk into the front hall to grab his jacket, and nearly yanked the phone from the wall.

"Don't flip your shit, Harrington. Everything's fine. I just need your help with something, and I know you're not working today. No need to go mama bear on me." Steve could almost hear him roll his eyes through the phone.

"Yeah. I'll be there in a minute," he pulled the phone away from his face for a moment to yell up to Robin that he was leaving. When there was no reply, he pulled a piece of note paper from the drawer in the island and wrote a note telling Robin that he was heading out and to lock the door behind her.

It wasn't until after he finished the note that he remembered Billy was still on the phone and quickly brought it back to his ear, hoping

he hadn't missed anything.

"-are you, Jesus?" was the very confusing question that greeted him.

"Pardon?"

"Jesus, Steve. Where the hell did you go?"

"Nowhere. I was just telling Robin I was leaving."

"Robin's there now?"

"Yeah. She stayed the night. Listen, I'm gonna let you go, I'll be there in fifteen 'kay?"

"Don't be ridiculous. It's rude to ditch a girl the morning after. I thought you were a fucking gentleman. I can deal on my own."

"Morning after? What are you- oh. Oh. No," Steve let out a slightly strangled laugh at the idea, "we weren't... anyway, she won't care. So, I'll see you soon." And then, in a move born of pure self-preservation, he hung up the phone.

When he arrived at Billy's apartment thirteen minutes later, he was woefully unaware that he was still wearing flannel pajama pants and an old Bananarama hoodie that he bought his mom years ago and always seemed to forget to actually give to her. In fact, he hadn't been thinking straight since he got off the phone. Slowly working himself up to a panic during the drive over, convinced that Billy was in some sort of trouble or that something had happened to Max. When he reached the apartment building his hands were shaking.

He swung open the car door, tried to get out and got yanked back by his seat belt. On his way up the stairs he tripped no less than three times. By the time he reached Billy's door he was gasping for breath and cursing himself for never going to the gym.

When Steve knocked there was a crash from inside and a muffled curse. Billy opened the door in a puff of white powder, which was admittedly, very dramatic, and also completely alarming. The most shocking part of the entire thing, in Steve's opinion, was the apron tied around Billy's waist, which had the cliché words 'kiss the chef'

printed across it.

“Are you baking?” Steve asked incredulously.

Billy rubbed a life weary hand against his brow, leaving a trail of what Steve now suspected was flour in its wake, and stepped back to let him in. The kitchen was a mess. It had never looked like this the entire time Billy had lived here, he always kept it so clean. So clean that Steve joked he could eat off the flour, to which Billy often responded that if he didn’t shut up, he would be eating off the floor.

Steve tried and failed to stifle his laughter, “what the hell happened?”

“I’m trying to bake a damn cake for Max’s birthday. I thought that if you could cook you could bake. Isn’t that a thing. It’s the same, right?”

“Uhm... no. If baking were cooking then it would just be called cooking,” Steve grinned.

“Ha-fucking-ha. Real funny, Harrington. Listen, what the hell does it mean to fold ingredients together, and why does the icing make tiny little slimy clumps when I whisk it?”

And that is how Steve ended up teaching Billy to bake. Well, attempting to teach Billy to bake. Considering that Steve was kitchen illiterate and had never baked a day in his life, he wasn’t much help. In the end, however, they managed to cobble together a cake. It was dangerously crooked, and they put the icing on when it was still too hot, so it looked a bit like a volcano, but Max loved it.

She came home to a disaster zone and two chocolate covered sort of adults arguing about which sprinkles would be better, rainbow, or solid purple.

“I’d prefer purple,” they both froze at the sound of her voice, and Steve fumbled his container of sprinkles trying to catch it three times, before Billy snatched it out of the air.

“Shit. Why are you home so early? You can’t skip just ‘cause it’s your birthday, shitbird,” Billy growled, which admittedly wasn’t that

threatening considering he had chocolate frosting smeared on his cheek.

“I didn’t skip, idiot. It’s four in the afternoon.”

Both boys exclaimed in shock and Billy started frantically running around trying to clean up the mess they had made.

Steve put purple and rainbow sprinkles on the cake.

Much later that night when Max was in bed, the party had disbanded, and Steve had finally convinced Billy that the apartment was clean enough, they sprawled out on the couch together. Steve absently flicked through channels on the tv, and Billy stared meditatively at the grainy flashes of shows and sports that Steve clicked passed. They were both quiet for a while, enjoying finally having a break after a day filled with overexcited kids.

Billy nudged Steve’s leg with his foot, “Thanks for coming over today, man. It was really- is that a fucking Bananarama hoodie?”

“Well, that was almost very nice,” Steve grumbled, “and yeah, asshole, it is.”

“Have you been wearing that all day? Jesus, I can’t believe you had the nerve to show up here wearing that.”

Steve would have told Billy that it wasn’t really his, but something about Billy’s tone stopped him, made him want to defend the friendly old sweater. Now it was personal.

“Excuse me. I saved your ass today. Also, what the hell is your problem with Bananarama?”

“I can’t believe you can ever ask that!”

Steve shoved Billy’s shoulder knocking him into the arm of the couch. He glared with all the ferocity he could muster. Billy laughed, which was not the reaction he was going for. Well, there was nothing for it after that, the argument could not be won without a fight. Steve tackled Billy and the living room became a war zone.

They managed to role onto the floor, Steve's shin getting gauged by the corner of the coffee table on the way down. For a while they were nothing but a flailing mass of limbs. Neither of them could stop laughing. Billy kept huffing, "Fuckin' Bananarama," and between gasping breaths Steve would wheeze something about ungrateful bastards who didn't appreciate music. There may have been a descriptor between the words appreciate and music, but it was mumbled, and completely unintelligible.

In the end, Billy pinned Steve to the ground, straddled his hips, and wiggled his fingers unforgivingly against Steve's belly until there were tears forming the corners of his eyes and he was begging for mercy.

They spent the rest of the night watching shitty reruns and sharing the leftover chocolate cake.

Later, Billy would consider the entire ordeal a resounding success, and pretend not to notice the not infrequent reappearances of that damn hoodie.

*

Steve didn't know what the hell he was doing with his life. He was still working a shit job at the mall. He had sent out a batch of resumes at the end of the summer, but when he didn't get any offers, he gave up on the whole thing. Robin kept telling him he'd never get anywhere like that, but he ignored her.

His days were long and boring, and far more exhausting than they had any right to be. At first it was okay; he was busy with the kids and helping Billy; but now things were settling. He saw the kids when they needed him to drive them somewhere, or when they needed his big empty house for DnD. Sometimes Dustin would come over to watch movies. And as time progressed, he saw less and less of Billy. He was so busy with work, his apprenticeship had started and Hawkins had finally gotten around to building an indoor pool. Lifeguarding paid well, and Billy couldn't pass up the opportunity, to bring in extra cash. And Robin had a life. So, Steve was mostly alone.

It felt like freshman year all over again, when his parents had

determined him old enough to stay home alone and stopped hiring nannies to stay with him. Those were the days before popular Steve was created, when there was no buffer between him and all the other miner-niners. He had spent his days trying to figure out the convoluted intricacies of high school, and his nights eating microwave lasagna and watching movies on his parents' bed, trying to pretend that he wasn't all by himself in a house that would be the perfect set for a horror movie. Maybe one where an unsuspecting kid is left home alone and gets slowly eaten by a monster that promises to actually stick around.

*

It started raining just as Steve's shift ended, and in the short distance between the mall and his car, and then between his car and his front door, he had been doused in freezing water. When he made it into the house he threw his keys toward the entryway table and missed, kicked off his shoes and hung his jacket, which was dripping from the rain.

He left the keys where they had fallen and headed to the stairs. His hair and pants were drenched, and, upon further inspection, so were his underwear. Steve paused for a long moment in front of the bathroom door trying to talk himself into a shower, before finally moving on. The Bananarama hoodie was fished from a corner, and Steve settled in the living room with a bag of chips. He tried to turn on the tv.

It was at the precise moment that the power went out.

There wasn't a single flashlight in the entire house. Well, there might be one in the basement but there was no way in hell Steve was gonna go down there in the dark. No fucking way. For a while he just huddled at the back by the glass sliding door, but the daylight was almost completely gone, and Steve was starting to panic.

It wasn't a conscious decision to grab his keys off the floor and head back out into the rain still clutching a bag of chips to his chest. Nor was it his intention to drive straight to a building on the fringes of town, trudge up three flights of stairs and knock on Billy's door, while a puddle formed on the carpet below his feet.

He was still holding the bag of chips when Billy opened the door.

Notes for the Chapter:

I hope you enjoyed the chapter! I will try to post more soon.

3. Talking in the Dark

Notes for the Chapter:

I'm thinking one more chapter for this, but I may keep going if I come up with more ideas.

The apartment was very quiet when Billy let him in. Steve was exceedingly surprised by the stillness, power outages seemed to be just the kind of thing to excite Max to no end. But there was no sign of her at all. He stood awkwardly in the hall waiting for Billy to come back with the dry clothes he had promised, looking around and waiting for the moment that Max realized he was there, and that the power was out, and what a spook the jumpy Steve moment this was. But she didn't appear. Instead, Billy reemerged with a change of clothes and sent Steve off to the bathroom with a sharp warning to take off his wet shoes before he was kicked out.

All of the clothes Billy had given him were soft, a black t-shirt that was obviously old and well loved, a pair of sweatpants that were fluffy and warm on the inside, and a pair of socks that surely were too thick to be worn with shoes. The only thing that made the whole extremely comfortable clothes experience less enjoyable was that he had to change in the dark. He ended up turning his back to the mirror, because every time he accidentally looked up at himself the glint of his own eyes looking back at him made shivers skitter up his spine and filled him with a visceral urge to run away. In fact, when he was fully dressed once again, he practically flew out of the door and back into the living room.

Billy was waiting for him on the couch. He looked totally at ease, leaning back against the armrest with his legs spread obnoxiously wide. Steve had to suppress the desire to climb up into his lap and hide in all of that confidence. He wanted to pull Billy on like a second skin and feel safe again.

Instead, he sat down on the other side of the couch and asked, "where's Max?"

"She's with El and Hopper for the night," Billy turned to look out the

window for a second before glancing back at Steve, eyebrows pinched together, “are you alright?”

“Yeah. Yeah, of course,” Steve tried to laugh, but wasn’t sure if he had quite managed it.

“Right. Of course you’re fucking fine. That’s why you showed up here in the middle of the night soaking wet looking like you wanted to fucking scream. Whatever, dipshit.” Steve might not be able to see him roll his eyes, but he sure as fuck could hear it. It dripped from his words in thick drops of sarcastic disdain.

“I just... the house was so... It was fucking dark, man.” Steve said lamely, wishing that the floor would open up and swallow him. God, could he sound more pathetic? What was wrong with him? He braced himself to be called a baby, to be told to grow up, that he was an adult, and he shouldn’t react this way just because he was afraid of the dark. Not that he was afraid of the dark... was he?

But Billy didn’t react how Steve had expected, how his parents would have. He just nodded, ran his fingers through his hair and headed to the kitchen. A moment later he reappeared with a plastic bowl full of the chips Steve had carried over like they were a teddy bear, and two precariously balanced glasses of water.

They sat in companionable silence for a while, just munching on chips and waiting for the power to come back on. After about an hour of this the chips were gone, the power was still out, and Steve was staring meditatively down at the last drops of water in the bottom of his glass. This was when Billy finally decided to speak.

“Does it drive you crazy living in that big empty house?” he asked apropos of nothing.

“What do you mean?” Steve tried to keep his voice calm and even, despite the sudden tightness in his chest.

“I mean, you’re always watching right? Like, waiting for those things to come back. You do it here sometimes. You’ll be doing whatever and suddenly you freeze like you thought you heard something. And you always keep the lights on at your house...” he trailed off eyes

pinned to Steve with piercing intensity.

“How... How do you know a-about them?” Steve asked stupidly. He caste his mind back trying to remember if he had ever said something, or maybe Billy had seen the demodog in the fridge that night, or...?

“Max told me.”

“And you just believed her?” Steve’s eyebrows felt like they were about to fly off his face.

Billy chuckled, “Nah. It took some convincing, but her and her loser friends are really fucking stubborn when they want to be.”

“Right.” Steve muttered, trying to wrap his head around the fact that Billy knew. That he had probably known for a while, and that, apparently, he had been paying attention to Steve enough to see that he was scared shitless.

“So... the house?” Billy prompted.

Steve didn’t know what words to use to describe what was wrong with him. Why it was so hard for him to move on like everyone else seemed to be just fine doing. Why he had to sleep with a lamp on like a little kid who’s afraid of monsters hiding under his bed. Because Steve is afraid of monsters. And if they do come back, they could come from anywhere at any time.

“Hey, Stevie. Just breath, okay? Just take a deep breath. In and out, come on, nice and slow.” There was a hand on his chest pressing gently but with a steady pressure that helped him focus on the motion of his chest as he struggled to breath. His vision seemed to have fogged over and no amount of blinking or shaking his head seemed to make it clear. It took him a long time to realize that he was crying. An even longer time for his lungs to stop fighting against the air they so desperately craved. He hoped that when the whole gasping like a fish out of water thing passed so would the crying, but luck didn’t seem to be on his side.

He wasn’t sobbing, far from it. In fact, the tears were barely spilling

over. Mostly they were just clogging up his eyes like fog that forms on car windows in the winter. He really hoped Billy didn't notice. That was probably a lost cause at this point though, considering how close they were now sitting. Even with the darkness, it would be hard to miss the presence of sparkling sissy tears in the eyes of the guys you just talked down from a panic attack.

"How's your chest feel, Stevie? Still like there's an elephant sitting on it?" that deep and creamy voice was so soft. Gentling on his name. The little 'ie' on the end that turned his name from something familiar into something completely new. Something that made his heart warm.

"It-it's okay. I-I'm fine, s-sorry," he stuttered pathetically. He expected Billy to move away, or for his hand to be removed from Steve's chest at the very least, but he did neither of those things. Made no attempt whatsoever to put space between him and the still misty-eyed Steve. It was this fact that Steve would later blame for what he did next.

"I don't want them to come back. It's like, there are so many fucking places for them to hide in that stupid house. An-and I don't even want to die in that house! I hate that house. When the lights are off it's like they're all around me. I think they're the house, Billy. The house is the monster, or the monsters are the house. They're in the walls." He bit his lip in an attempt to make himself shut the fuck up. What was he even talking about? The house was the monster? No, Steve. The house was a house.

When he glanced up, Billy was watching him with those big blue eyes, a few curls had strayed onto his face, falling right above his nose. He had freckles just like Max, they dusted across his cheeks in a pattern that Steve could barely make out in the dark. He opened his mouth as if about to say something, probably something reassuring, judging by the soft expression on his face. Maybe something with the word 'Stevie' in it. Steve didn't want to hear what he had to say, goddamn it.

So, he did the only thing his sleep deprived, scared little mind could come up with the stop Billy from speaking. He leaned over and kissed him.

4. That Ass?

Notes for the Chapter:

I apologize for any grammatical error there may be in this chapter. I admit that editing was minimal.

The rating is because of this chapter, you have been warned.

The first thing Steve noticed was how soft Billy's lips were. It was like kissing a cloud, or a pillow, or a marshmallow. Just, so soft.

The second thing he noticed was that Billy wasn't kissing back. That was when reality came crashing down around Steve's ears and he practically threw himself off of the couch to get away. He wanted to apologize, to grovel, to beg Billy to forget it had ever happened.

Here's the thing: Steve knew he wasn't very smart. He had always known. But he had never thought he was this stupid. What the hell had he been thinking? Of all the semi-idiotic things he had done in his life, this took the cake. Which sucked, 'cause he had been hoping that the next time he kissed someone it would be a good thing. Not something that filled him with dread and self-hatred.

He scrambled off the couch cursing and apologizing, his words slurring together. Once he was on his feet, he didn't quite know what to do with himself. Should he leave? He should leave. His journey to the front door was halted by a strong hand closing around his wrist. Closing his eyes, Steve waited. And waited. The silence prickled against his skin and murmured unspoken fears in his ears. For a long moment he held out before his eyes flicked open to glance at Billy.

He was surprised by what he saw. There was no judgement, no anger, no disgust. But there wasn't anything else either. Billy's expression was not one Steve had ever seen on his face before. He couldn't put a name to it, and so he couldn't take comfort from it.

"I'm so sorry, Billy," he whispered, throat clogged by a tight ball of emotion. "I- I really.... I'm s-sorry."

There was no response, but the fingers flexed around his wrist. Billy tugged, drawing him closer. Steve started to panic.

“Look, Billy, just let me go. I didn’t mean to. I’m not- I won’t do it again. I-.”

“Shut up,” Steve flinched at his sharp tone, and Billy’s face softened, “hey,” his thumb smoothed across the back of Steve’s hand. “I’m not mad.”

He wasn’t mad? Then why was he torturing Steve like this? Why wouldn’t he just let Steve go? Why-

Steve may have known he wasn’t very smart, but he had never had reason to label himself as unobservant. Yet somehow, he had managed to move -with minimal encouragement from Billy- until he was almost pressed against the other man’s chest without noticing. So now, when he looked up from where his eyes had been trained on the carpet, he found that they were mere inches apart.

His Brain stopped working.

Because Billy was smiling at him. His lips turned up at the corners, eyes crinkled, even his nose was scrunched up. It felt like getting punched in the face. Left Steve reeling, unable to pull his eyes away. Billy was so beautiful. God, he couldn’t lose him.

“I’m-,” he tried again, desperate to make things right.

But Billy didn’t let him finish, pressing a hand against Steve’s mouth, he spoke, still smiling, “I don’t want to hear that your sorry unless you really are, Steve. So, if you’re really sorry that you kissed me,” it sounded like he punched his way through each of the words, “then you can continue. But if you’re not...” He trailed off, raising an eyebrow. This may have been a sign to someone used to being flirted with by guys like Billy, but Steve unfortunately didn’t have that kind of know-how. Thus, he took what in his mind was the better course of action.

“I am sorry that I kissed you-“ the smile started to fade, “- I really am. I don’t ever want to do anything that would make you not want me

around... I mean," he added quickly, "anything that would make your life harder. Fuck, man, I just shouldn't have done that."

Billy looked like he was at war with himself. Like maybe he wanted to smack a palm against his forehead and lament Steve's bumbling ways. He also looked like he was about to burst out laughing. What shocked Steve though, was the flicker of something else beneath the surface. Curiosity maybe, or hunger.

"So, let me get this straight," Billy spoke quietly, his other hand coming up to press gently into Steve's side. "You are sorry that you kissed me, 'cause you want me to keep you?"

Of course he had to phrase it like that. In such a way that made a flush rise up Steve's neck, making his face and even his ears feel hot. And of course, Billy noticed. A shit-eating grin spread across his face, as his eyes ate up the evidence of Steve's embarrassment.

He must have gotten his fill, however, because he was descending on Steve like a fucking storm. Slow and completely inescapable. Not that Steve had any intention of escaping. At the moment he had no intention of doing anything anytime soon. 'Cause he had no idea what the fuck was happening. Which turned out to be okay because you weren't required to know much in these situations. The only knowledge required was how to follow the leader, which every kindergartener has down pat, and even Steve couldn't fuck up. Right?

Well, mostly.

Billy's lips met his with none of the hesitation or anxiety which had been fueling Steve all evening. His kiss was sure and slow and all encompassing. The hand that had still been wrapped around Steve's wrist traveled up his arm to cup the back of his neck, while his other hand firmed its grip on his waist. For a moment everything was perfect, they kissed in tandem, and the world stilled around them. Then the fairy tale moment came to a close, as they're wont to do.

Steve pressed closer and knocked their noses together. He tried to remember what he was supposed to do with his arms and may have, kind of, possibly, smacked Billy on the ass by accident. That was a little too much for Billy, who let go of Steve with a shout of laughter

and practically fell onto the couch in a fit of mirth.

“I didn’t mean to,” Steve muttered sullenly.

Billy gasped for breath, tears forming in the corners of his eyes. His hands were flapping at Steve in an ambiguous gesture that only served to further irritate him. At least Steve wasn’t anxious now, unfortunately the emotion that took its place was indignation rather than say, fiery passion.

He stormed off.

Like many of the dramatic things Steve did, this one was not very effective. Yes, he stormed off, but there wasn’t really anywhere to go. Unless he left the apartment, which wasn’t even an option that crossed his mind. So, he stormed to Billy’s room, and cocooned himself in Billy’s blankets.

Not long after, the aforementioned owner of the bed came to investigate. He curled up beside the pile of blankets that was Steve and smiled a smile that Steve didn’t see, but that he would see many many times in his life. It was full of warmth and fondness and everything soft. “I know you didn’t mean to,” Billy poked at the blankets, “that’s why it was funny.”

With much coaxing and promises of a breakfast of pancakes in the morning, Steve finally emerged, face flushed and a little sweaty. Billy couldn’t help but lean over and kiss him.

And kiss him.

They rolled across the bed. The blankets that Steve had been hiding under were kicked from the bed, to lay in a heap on the floor. Steve tried to be more careful with his movements than before, but Billy encouraged him to be brave. This is a fact that Steve would never admit. He had never before had issues being brave in these sorts of situations, not ‘til after Nancy, but he hadn’t really been getting any since Nancy, so...

It was not a dignified kiss. Their teeth clicked together sometimes, and Steve still couldn’t quite control his limbs, but it was amazing.

Never before had Steve laughed while kissing someone. He had always been too busy trying to lead the kiss somewhere. It wasn't like that with Billy if anything the kiss was leading them. There was no conscious thought when Steve ran his hand up under Billy's shirt to feel the smooth expanse of his work-toned abdomen. Or when he lifted his arms to allow Billy to slip his borrowed shirt over his head.

When Billy's shirt was lost over the side of the bed, Steve's eyes roamed hungrily over the bronze skin that was revealed, trailed his fingers over arms that were enormously strong from hours of hard work at the shop. The whole time Billy hovered over him and let him look, let him touch. He watched Steve's face, with wide searching blue eyes, that fought to stay open even when Steve's lips wrapped around one of his nipples.

The noises Billy made were deep and unexpectedly quiet. A long, drawn-out moan when Steve played with his nipples. A deep sigh, when Steve kissed his bicep, or trailed his lips across his chest. He spoke too, sometimes, whispered words that made Steve's insides melt. Things like, "that's so good," and, "right there, sweetheart," and, "God, you're amazing."

Time was nonexistent to Steve. He would never get tired of this. Of having access to Billy like this, to hearing his voice so sweet and quiet and just for him. Eventually Billy took over, effectively ending Steve's exploration, but he wasn't complaining.

Pants were undone and kicked clumsily off the edge of the bed. Steve tried to pull Billy's unfairly sexy boxer briefs off but was distracted by the hands pressing insistently at him and the breathless voice in his ear that insisted he "turn over."

Steve had never had someone's fingers up his ass, so he was understandably nervous when Billy's slick fingers slipped between his cheeks. His body tensed up painfully, "Billy I-" he started, not sure what exactly he wanted to say, and unreasonably disappointed when Billy's fingers immediately froze where they were, barely pressed against his hole.

"You want me to stop, sweetheart?" there was no judgement, not pressure. When he didn't immediately answer, the presence behind

him began to retreat.

“No! No, just... I’ve never done, uh, this.” He looked over his shoulder, trying to see Billy’s face.

“I have, if it makes you feel better.”

Steve rolled onto his back, staring up at Billy incredulously, “what! When?”

“In Cali,” Billy grinned at whatever was happening on Steve’s face, “awe, don’t worry, baby, he didn’t mean anything to me. Just an experiment.”

“I’m not worried,” Steve huffed.

The space between them seemed to be too wide for Billy, and he leaned in again to kiss Steve. He trailed his lips down Steve’s neck to suck a biting kiss on his collar bone. Steve arched up into the contact, mouth falling open to let out a high breathy noise. Sufficiently encouraged, Billy’s hands sprang back into action. He rubbed over Steve’s stomach, and wrapped around his love handles.

“God, you’re fucking perfect,” Billy moaned into the skin of his neck, his hands still full of Steve’s biggest insecurity about his body. Wasn’t that just the name of the day? Billy facing down Steve’s fears, showing him how it’s done.

He wanted to tell Billy that he was full of shit. That Steve was far from perfect, and he could honestly do with a workout, but all that came out was, “really?” Billy’s answer really left no room to question, so Steve did his best to ignore the give of his body beneath Billy, and just enjoy.

To enjoy the slide of Billy’s hands down his hips to his thighs. How those hands spread his legs open to make room that was quickly occupied by a gorgeous grinning asshole that Steve just couldn’t get enough of.

Billy rested his cheek on Steve’s thigh for a moment, as if considering what he wanted to do. His breathes made Steve achingly aware of how hard he was, pre drooling generously from the tip of his cock.

When Billy wrapped a calloused hand around him his hips jerked into the contact immediately. A strangled “shit” torn from his throat. The dry drag of skin against skin sent lightning skittering through Steve’s body leaving him embarrassingly close to the edge.

For a while Billy let his hand rest, allowing Steve to catch his breath a bit, before swooping in tongue first. Steve didn’t quite scream, but it was a close thing. He clamped a hand over his mouth he fought the urge to thrust his dick down Billy’s throat. Luckily, he didn’t seem to have to, Billy was doing just fine on his own, head bobbing at just the right speed, tongue in full attendance.

It wasn’t long before Steve was gasping and trying to convince his fingers to release their death grip on the sheets so he could touch those bouncing curls. When he made contact the first thing he noticed was how soft Billy’s hair was, and then how unfair that fact was. Honestly, how could his hair look so perfect all the time and yet feel like a fucking dream? The thoughts were swept from his mind when Billy lifted his head and sucked pointedly at the head of Steve’s cock.

“Shit,” the syllable was long and drawn out, “Shit, Billy. I’m gonna c-come if you don’t stop.”

Billy didn’t stop.

Steve went off like a shot, and Billy fucking swallowed it down like it was nothing. When he finally popped off, Steve was writhing with over sensitivity. Billy’s lips were red and swollen, and stretched into that stupid grin that Steve was slowly but surely falling in love with.

“How you feelin’, sweetheart?” Billy asked, voice rough like he had been gargling gravel.

“Billy,” was all the answer he received, but it seemed to be enough. Steve tried to reach for Billy, wanting to take care of him too, but his hand was caught again.

Billy’s eyes searched his, and something clicked in Steve’s head. He pushed Billy away, ignoring the confused, “what?”, and rolled onto his stomach. Turning his head so he could see Billy, he deliberately

spread his legs.

Steve would never forget the noise that Billy made then. Or the way that he had to wrap a hand around his cock to stop himself from coming while he watched Steve all laid out for him.

It wasn't quite what Steve had imagined, having fingers inside him, it was definitely better. Yeah, it was weird, and the stretch did burn, but there was something satisfying about being filled like this. And when Billy found his prostrate he almost got whiplash from how fast he got hard again. The whole time, Billy spoke softly to him, sometimes with his mouth pressed between his shoulder blades, sometimes against his neck.

By the time Billy rolled on a condom and slicked himself up, Steve was a puddle of nerves on the bed. His moan was a long stuttering vowel as Billy pressed inside. Everything was slow and careful for a while, until Steve reached behind him and smacked Billy's ass.

*

That was the first night Steve spent in Billy's bed. The first morning he woke up to the sound of someone trying and failing to quietly make pancakes. The first day that he didn't go back to his parent's house, because home was somewhere else.

Notes for the Chapter:

This is it folks! Thanks for following along. It's been a blast writing this!

Author's Note:

So, I have a bit more of this written. I'm not sure exactly where I'm going with it yet, but hopefully it'll come to me. If ya'll like it please let me know, it will really help to motivate me!